

M.A. Comprehensive Exam
Department of Linguistics and Asian/Middle Eastern Languages
San Diego State University
(revised 04/21/25)

In lieu of a thesis, an M.A. comprehensive exam option is available to M.A. students in the General and TESOL/Applied Linguistics specializations.

The Comprehensive Exam consists of **two short ‘sit-down’ exams** and **one week-long take-home exam**. The format of each exam type is described below.

On each portion of the exam, students will be given one of the following scores: **Commendable**, **Pass**, or **Fail**. To pass the whole exam, the student must receive a score of pass or commendable on all three exams, and each question within an exam. A student whose score on an exam is good but still not passing may be asked to **revise and resubmit** his/her answer within the same exam cycle and after receiving feedback. If an exam is failed, it cannot be re-taken until the following semester. Exams are not administered during summer.

Sit-Down Exams

The sit-down exams are a 24-hour take-home exam. The student chooses the areas in which to take the two sit-down exams from a list provided by the Graduate Advisor (see below). Students should only choose exam areas in which they have **completed** *at least one* relevant course. (Note: for topics associated with two or more relevant courses, it is only necessary to take *one* of the relevant courses). There is no predetermined reading list for each topic. Students should consult the professor writing the exam questions for guidance about how the information will be tested and about how best to prepare.

General Linguistics

Students in the General Linguistics specialization must choose **one** of the following topics for the first sit-down exam.

<u>Sit-down exam Topics</u>	<u>Relevant Courses</u>
Phonology	521
Syntax	522, 620

Note: if you took 521 and 522 (or their equivalents at another university) as an undergraduate and did not take courses in the above areas while in our MA program, you must still choose phonology or syntax for your first 24-hour exam.

General students must choose **one** of the following topics for the second sit-down exam.

<u>Sit-down exam Topics</u>	<u>Relevant Courses</u>
Bilingualism	553
Computational Linguistics	571, 581
Discourse Analysis	526

Heritage Language Bilingualism	627
Historical Linguistics	610
Language in Mind & Society	502, 602
Morphology	523
Phonology (if not chosen for exam #1)	521
Pragmatics	626
Psycholinguistics	552
Second Language Acquisition	652
Semantics	525
Seminar (w/ General or Computational content)	795
Sociolinguistics	551, 651
Syntax (if not chosen for exam #1)	522, 620

**Available topics are subject to change. Please consult the Graduate Advisor for the most up-to-date list when declaring your intent to take M.A. exams.*

IMPORTANT: General Linguistics students can only be tested on the same topic once. For example, if a student wishes to choose formal syntax for one of the two sit-down exams, formal syntax may not be chosen as an exam topic for the week-long take home exam, even if the student has taken more than one course in formal syntax (e.g., 522 and 620). The same applies to sociolinguistics (551 and 651) and language in mind and society (502 and 602). This restriction is reiterated with more detail in the section about the week-long exams.

Exception: Linguistics 610 and 795 are variable topics courses. A student who repeats 610 or 795 *with different content* may—in consultation with the graduate advisor and examining faculty—select one topic for a sit-down exam and the other for a week-long take-home exam. If 795 is the repeated course, both must contain General or Computational content.

Applied Linguistics

Students in the Applied Linguistics specialization must take at least **one** sit-down exam in an area from List A and may choose to take both sit-down exams in areas from List A. A maximum of one sit-down exam may be taken in an area from List B.

<u>List A</u>	<u>Relevant Courses</u>
Computer-Assisted Language Learning/Teaching	556
Research Methods	656
Second Language Acquisition	652
Seminar in Linguistics (w/ Applied Content)	795
 <u>List B</u>	 <u>Relevant Courses</u>
Bilingualism	553
Computational Linguistics	571, 581
Discourse Analysis	526
Heritage Language Bilingualism	627

Historical Linguistics	610
Language in Mind & Society	502, 602
Morphology	523
Phonology	521
Pragmatics	626
Psycholinguistics	552
Semantics	525
Sociolinguistics	551, 651
Syntax	522, 620

**Available topics are subject to change. Please consult the Graduate Advisor for the most up-to-date list when declaring your intent to take M.A. exams.*

Week-Long Take-Home Exam

The content of the week-long take-home exam depends on the specialization courses that the student took. The student should consult the Graduate Advisor and the faculty of his/her specialization for additional information about the exam format.

General Linguistics

Students in the General Linguistics specialization are required to take one 600- or 700-level class in at least three different topics chosen from the list below. The week-long exam covers **two** of those topics. If you have completed three or more topics prior to the exam, you may choose whichever two you wish. The format of the week-long take-home exam can vary so please consult with the faculty writing the exam questions for guidance.

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Relevant Courses</u>
Advanced Study in Language, Mind, & Society	602
Historical Linguistics	610
Advanced Formal Syntax	620
Pragmatics	626
Studying the Speech Community	651
Special Topics (General or Computational content)	696
Seminar (General or Computational content)	795

IMPORTANT: Students can only be tested on the same topic once. For example, if a student wishes to choose Advanced Formal Syntax (LING 620) as one of the areas for the week-long take-home exam, formal syntax may not be chosen as one of the two sit-down exams, even if the student took other courses in formal syntax (e.g., 522). Likewise, if a student wishes to choose an advanced course in Sociolinguistics (LING 651) as one of the topics for the week-long take-home exam, sociolinguistics may not be chosen for a sit-down exam, even if the student has taken another course in sociolinguistics (e.g., 551). Similarly, choosing Advanced Study in Language, Mind, and Society (LING 602) for the week-long exam precludes choosing a sit-down exam that tests material covered in LING

502.

Exception: Linguistics 610 and 795 are variable topics courses. A student who repeats 610 or 795 *with different content* may—in consultation with the graduate advisor and examining faculty—select one topic for a sit-down exam and the other for a week-long take-home exam. If 795 is the repeated course, both must contain General or Computational content.

Applied Linguistics

Students in the Applied Linguistics specialization are required to take one 600-level course in at least two different topics chosen from the list below. You will be tested on the **two** topics you took. If you have completed three or more topics prior to the exam, you may choose whichever two you wish. The week-long exam involves a synthesis of literature encompassing the areas of research covered in both topics and an application of relevant literature in the construction of pedagogical materials (tests, curriculum, lesson plans etc.) to be used in a specific ESL context. In essence, the exam allows students to discuss the current research in the chosen areas and create materials for a specific ESL population employing this current research.

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Relevant Courses</u>
Materials Development	650
ESL Reading and Writing	653
English for Specific Purposes & Content-Based Instruction	655
Foundations of Language Assessment	657